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ABSTRACT

The renewed emphasis on the community college transfer function has both positive and negative aspects. On one hand, the creation of articulation agreements, transfer centers, consortia, and national centers promises to reduce the barriers between two- and four-year colleges, enhance the mobility of minority students, and improve teaching and learning. On the other hand, raising the academic emphasis of the community college above all other purposes might weaken the comprehensive nature of these institutions and still fail to improve transfer rates. The decline in transfer rates is due to a host of causes, many of which not effectively addressed by articulation agreements or transfer centers. These factors include the rise of vocational programs relative to academic programs, nontraditional attendance patterns, declining achievement in high school, and declining federal financial aid. Efforts to enhance the transfer function should promote the other purposes of the comprehensive community college as well, including: (1) providing low-cost/low-risk options for "experimenters" and "undecided" students; (2) integrating academic and vocational education; (3) making developmental education more effective; and (4) minimizing the tracking of "low-ability" students into vocational programs and otherwise preserving educational equity. Community colleges will improve transfer rates and the college as a whole by focusing on: initial student assessment and counseling, remediation centers linked to both academic and vocational programs, coherent sequences of courses, the gathering of comprehensive information on student progress and follow-up statistics, improved instruction, placement and transfer centers, increased student financial aid, and better preparation of high school students for college-level work. (GFW)

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FINDING AN EQUILIBRIUM: ENHANCING TRANSFER RATES AND MAINTAINING THE COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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FINDING AN EQUILIBRIUM: ENHANCING TRANSFER RATES AND MAINTAINING THE COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE*

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A furor over transfer rates has developed within the past few years. Evidence about low and declining transfers from two- to four-year colleges has been cited — and mis-cited — by state legislators concerned about the performance of public institutions, by advocates worried about the low rates of transfer among minority students (e.g., Pincus and Archer, 1989), and by critics interpreting low transfer rates as evidence of fundamental inequities (e.g., Brint and Karabel, 1989). In response, there has been a rush — a veritable stampede, in some quarters —to strengthen the transfer functions of the community college. In the prevailing metaphor, the pendulum may have begun to swing one more time: from the academic and transfer-oriented community college of the 1960s and earlier, to the increasingly vocational community college with an accretion of remedial and community-service functions that developed in the late 1960s and 1970s, and now back to a transfer-oriented community college.

The most obvious manifestation of the renewed interest in transfer is simply the level of public attention. Numerous reports, several with national sponsorship, have highlighted the importance of the transfer function, most of them recommending increased attention to articulation mechanisms with four-year colleges (e.g., Bender, 1990; Wechsler, 1989; Donovan, Shaier-Peleg, and Forer, 1987; Prager, 1988). Increasing numbers of colleges seem to be establishing articulation agreements and transfer centers, to provide various support services to transfer-oriented students. Two independent consortia have developed to help colleges collect their own data on transfer rates — the National Effective Transfer Consortium (e.g., Berman et al., 1990) and the Transfer Assembly, sponsored by UCLA's Center for the Study of Community Colleges and the Ford Foundation. The National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer of the American Council on Education, also sponsored by the Ford Foundation, has begun to articulate

* A previous version of this paper was presented at the Leadership 2000 conference in June 1990. I received helpful (if not always complimentary) comments from several individuals including Arthur Cohen, Tom Fryer, Gerry Hayward, Dorothy Knoell, Terry O'Banion, and Jim Palmer.

an "academic model" to enhance transfer, focusing on teaching methods and curriculum development in addition to articulation agreements or student services (NCAAT, 1990). At the policy level, many states have strengthened their transfer-oriented policies, usually by requiring articulation agreements, course comparability, state-level articulation councils, and student data systems (Bender, 1990).

From one perspective, all this activity is marvelous. It promises to reduce the barriers between two- and four-year institutions, to enhance the mobility of minority students, and to improve teaching and learning. But the renewed emphasis on transfer has its dark side as well. The most obvious danger is that the current efforts to improve transfer won't be very effective. Although evidence about low and declining transfer rates has been widely cited, the causes of declining transfer have often not been carefully examined. The almost exclusive emphasis on articulation mechanisms ignores several of the most important causes, which are problems that emerge earlier in a student's career than at the junction of two- and four-year colleges. In the first section I therefore present my own analysis of the data, to clarify the many factors that are responsible for declining transfer rates and to argue for a broader approach to the problem.

A second, potentially threatening aspect of the current emphasis on transfer is that it might raise the academic emphasis of the community college above other purposes, and diminish the vocational and the remedial (or developmental) functions — and in the process might weaken the *comprehensive* community college. The current efforts to enhance transfer — the transfer centers, articulation agreements, faculty development efforts to improve academic instruction, administrative positions to develop and monitor articulation agreements, data systems designed to track transfer students, the various recent state policies, as well as many proposals not yet implemented like those to establish academic schools within community colleges (Astin, 1988; Rendon and Amaury, 1988) — all focus their attention and resources exclusively on transfer-oriented students. By reallocating scarce resources toward transfer education, this movement may deny resources to vocational and remedial education; by placing greater emphasis on transfer-oriented education, this shift could further change the relative status of different parts of the community college. Already, administrators and teachers in vocational and developmental programs have begun to complain that they feel ignored, undervalued, and (in relative terms) starved for resources. Evidently, many perceive the allocation of resources to be a zero-sum game, with any gains by the academic side coming at the expense of vocational and remedial education. In this sense, the commonly-used metaphor of the pendulum is accurate: when the pendulum reverses its direction, it moves away from one apogee — in this case, vocational and remedial education — toward another. Whether this will in fact happen to any significant extent is yet unclear: it may be that a shift in the priorities of community colleges will not materialize. Still, the emphasis of current

proposals is one-sided, and to the extent they are implemented they work by emphasizing one purpose over others.

Of course, this swing of the pendulum — back toward a transfer-oriented community college — may be just the right thing to do. Perhaps a combination of academic junior colleges differentiated from postsecondary technical institutes — a system of specialized institutions rather than comprehensive community colleges, as states like Minnesota, Georgia, and Tennessee have — would better serve both the "academic" purposes of providing access to four-year colleges and the vocational purpose of providing access to immediate employment. The comprehensive community college has been, after all, a historical accident, a result of the accretion of functions over the past several decades; perhaps it would be just as well to dismantle the comprehensive community college, or at least to restore its transfer purposes to clear prominence over vocational and remedial purposes. But in my view this would be mistaken. There are many principled arguments for the comprehensive community college, some of which I present in the second section. Furthermore, a return to the academic junior college, concerned only with transfer, is a return to an educational ideal in which community colleges must compete with Harvard and Swarthmore — a competition which dooms them forever to second-class status. Instead, community colleges can define themselves in different terms, with their own conception of excellence as comprehensive institutions providing multiple options for a wide variety of students — a vision in which they can be excellent in their own terms rather than those dictated by others.

It remains, then, to develop methods of enhancing transfer which will *not* weaken the comprehensiveness of the the community college. In the final section I outline several changes which can enhance all purposes of community colleges, rather than improving transfer at the expense of others. Doing so involves redefining the challenge facing community colleges: rather than enhancing transfer alone, the real issue is enhancing the ability of many students to attain the goals they have set for themselves, whether these goals are vocational, transfer-oriented, or remedial, short-term or long-term. Restating the problem in more comprehensive terms clarifies why it is important to find solutions that can serve all these goals simultaneously, and how it is possible to do so. The problem is to find an equilibrium among the purposes of community colleges, rather than to accept the metaphor of the pendulum with its implication of reversing the course of the community college.

"Death by a Thousand Cuts": Interpreting the Trends in Transfer Rates

As Arthur Cohen (1990) and others have pointed out, it is a fool's errand to search for a single number describing transfer rates. Figures as low as 5 percent and as high as 84 percent can

be developed, and there are even transfer-related measures which can be above 100 percent![1] To specify a goal for transfer is similarly imponderable: whether 5 percent of students entering community colleges "should" transfer, or 25 percent, or 90 percent, is impossible to judge without more information about the aspirations of students, their preparation for college-level work, the resources they have for study rather than employment, and a host of other factors. But what is disturbing is that transfer rates — calculated with relatively consistent data, using consistent definitions — have declined over time. My results, presented in Table 1, provide an illustration for the high school classes of 1972 and 1980.[2] Transfer rates for different groups of students entering community colleges from the class of 1980 vary between 20 percent and 40 percent, and could be made to rise to 50 or 60 percent with a little more cooking. But what is more important than the *level* of transfer is the fact that the *trend* is uniformly down, for each of these groups — for academic students as well as vocational students,[3] those with high aspirations as well as those with more modest plans, and for those those who could be considered committed to college (as shown by accumulating at least 12 credits) as well as those whose commitment was evanescent.[4] Furthermore, transfer rates have declined for white as well as minority students, for students of high socio-economic status as well as lower-class students, for those who performed well in high school and came from the academic track as well as those of low performance and those from the general and vocational tracks. Even though there is no agreement about what transfer rates should be, the consistent of declining transfer rates with different definitions and populations indicate that the concern with transfer is justified.

However, my results indicate that the problem of declining transfer rates has been one of "death by a thousand cuts", rather than a single mortal blow; a large number of causes explain the decline, rather than any one factor. The rise of vocational programs in community colleges relative to academic programs is responsible for some part of the decline, since vocational students are

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[1] The measure of "transfer effectiveness" in the work of the National Effective Transfer Consortium can be over 100 percent because the numerator contains a term that does not appear in the denominator. Although this measure of effectiveness is different from the transfer rate the Consortium proposes, the two could be confused.

[2] These figures are drawn from a larger study of transfer, reported in Grubb (1990). They are based on a national random sample of high school students who are followed into postsecondary education; attendance in postsecondary institutions is based on information from transcripts, and is much more accurate than self-reported postsecondary attendance. A transfer rate of 20.2 percent means, for example, that 20.2 percent of students entering community colleges within four years of graduating from high school transferred to a four-year college. High and low ability and socio-economic status refer to the top and bottom quartiles. Of course, it is possible that the trend between these two cohorts haas since been reversed, and that more recent data would suggest thas the problem has gone away., But this seems unlikely: the fundamental causes of declining transfer have not changed, and it is too early for many of the current articulation efforts to have affected transfer.

[3] Academic students are defined as those with a majority of academic courses during their first semester, while vocational students had a majority of vocational courses.

[4] The practice of excluding students with relatively few credits from calculations of transfer rates, on the grounds that students with very few credits did not stay long enough to have any chance of transfer, has become common; both the National Effective Transfer Consortium and the Transfer Assembly have followed this practice.

TABLE 1

TRANSFER RATES AMONG STUDENTS ENTERING COMMUNITY COLLEGES

	Class of 1980	Class of 1972
All students	20.2%	28.7%
All students excluding "experimenters" (under 12 credits)	24.7	32.1
Academic students only	27.5	37.6
Academic students only excluding "experimenters"	33.7	41.5
Students aspiring to B.A. degrees	33.9	46.0
Students aspiring to B.A. degrees excluding "experimenters"	39.8	49.7
Male	24.6	30.6
Female	16.5	26.2
White	21.7	28.7
Black	10.2	27.1
Hispanic	15.7	25.9
Low SES	12.6	20.6
Middle SES	19.2	26.5
High SES	28.0	38.2
Low Ability	9.3	15.7
Middle Ability	23.6	28.6
High Ability	33.9	41.5
Academic track	31.5	39.5
General track	18.6	23.9
Vocational track	9.3	13.7
Aspirations: No PSE	6.7	15.4
Vocational/technical	6.8	8.9
Academic, < 4 years	10.3	19.9
BA	32.5	43.6
Advanced degree	37.0	52.9

somewhat less likely to transfer; this trend but explains only a small proportion of the decline — perhaps 15 percent — partly because vocational students are now almost as likely to transfer as those in academic programs. (See also Palmer, 1990.) A somewhat more important explanation is the apparent weakening of the academic Associate degree as a route to four-year colleges, since a declining fraction of students have completed an academic Associate degree and then transferred. That is turn may reflect the offerings in community colleges, some of which have failed to provide sophomore-level courses necessary for transfer because of declining enrollments (Palmer, 1988). It may also reflect the inability of many students to make adequate progress through community colleges. The problem of inadequate progress also helps explain the decreasing proportion of community college students who accumulate enough credits of the right type to transfer without first receiving an Associate degree, which by itself accounts for about two fifths of the declining transfer rate.

The phenomenon of inadequate progress is related to a more general problem in all of higher education — the problem of "milling around", describing postsecondary students who fail to put together a substantial and coherent program of courses and who leave without accumulating enough credits to be of much value for either transfer or employment (Grubb, 1989a and 1989b). "Milling around" is the dismal side of the increasing flexibility that came to all colleges — both two- and four-year — in the 1970s. Non-traditional patterns of attendance — including late entry, part-time enrollment, combining employment with schooling, and stopping out for periods of time — have given students more choices about how to complete a postsecondary program; but by weakening the "lock-step" progression through postsecondary education, they have made non-completion more likely.

Still another explanation of decreasing transfer rates is the apparent increase in students entering community college who might be considered "experimenters" — who enter to see whether college is suitable for them, but who leave within a short period of time (Manski, 1988). In the Class of 1980, 8.6 percent of students entering community colleges dropped out with six or fewer credits, and 18.3 percent left with twelve credits or less, compared to 4.0 percent and 10.5 percent respectively for the class of 1972. Of course, such experimentation is a legitimate activity — indeed, it may be the only way that undecided students can learn whether college is appropriate for them — and accommodating such "experimenters" is surely a legitimate function of community colleges. But an increase in the number of experimenters who drop out after only a few courses reduces completion rates, and is troubling because it suggests more students who are unsure about their futures. While it is difficult to know why the numbers of "experimenters" should have increased, my own observations in high schools and discussions with counselors suggests that career counseling in the high school has all but collapsed, and many more students leave high school with no idea what they want to do — a more serious problem for students entering

community colleges than those in four-year colleges, who have longer to figure out what they might do and a more rigid structure of progression through college. In addition, it seems plausible that increases in students uncertain of their educational and occupational goals hit community colleges just at the period of time when *laissez faire* policies, placing the greatest burdens on students for their educational programs, were at their zenith. However, as with the shift to more vocational students, the trend in "experimenters" accounts for only a small fraction of the decreased transfer rates.

Another partial explanation is the changing composition of students in community colleges. The increases in women relative to men, in minority students, in students of lower-socio-economic status, in students with lower achievement levels as measured by test scores and grades in high school and who were enrolled in vocational and general tracks have meant that community colleges have more students who have difficulty progressing through education. These students tend to accumulate fewer credits, are less likely to transfer without completing credentials, and are less likely to complete Associate degrees; if they do complete such degrees, they are less likely to transfer. However, the changes in the composition of students entering community colleges directly after high school have been relatively modest, and transfer rates have declined for almost every group of students; the finding that transfer rates have decreased for men as well as women, white students as well as minority students, those of the highest socio-economic status, and those with high grades and test scores suggests that a pervasive problem exists. In fact, the demographic shifts in community colleges cannot possibly account for more than one quarter to one third of the fall in transfer rates.

One more potential cause of declining transfer rates involves student aid. Student aid was increasing during the 1972-1976 period when the class of 1972 was moving into higher education (Gillespie and Carlson, 1983), but the cuts in student aid which began in 1981 would have reduced persistence after 1981. Thus financial aid patterns should increased persistence in the Class of 1972 — and by extension transfer rates from two- to four-year colleges — while it could only have decreased persistence and transfer for the Class of 1980. Declining student loans and grants after 1981 might be particularly damaging to transfer rates because many low-income students can attend two-year institutions without aid because costs are low and they can work while they attend school, but they are more likely to require such aid if they then go to a four-year college.

I conclude, therefore, that declining transfer rates are due to many small influences, among them the changing demographic backgrounds of students, declining achievement during high school, a decline of career counseling in the high school and an increase in the numbers of "experimenters" with poorly-formed plans, the shift from academic to vocational programs within community colleges, the apparent weakening of academic Associate degree programs as routes to transfer, an increase in "milling around" in all of postsecondary education, and declining federal

aid. However, most of the proposals to enhance transfer rates, like articulation agreements and coordination mechanisms between two- and four-year colleges, assume that the process of transfer into the four-year college is itself burdensome and discourages many potential students (Kintzer, 1982; Prager, 1988; Donovan, Shaier-Peleg, and Forer, 1987; Bender, 1989; Wechsler, 1989). This process may be a barrier, but it does not explain in any obvious way why transfer rates have deteriorated unless this process itself became more unwieldy during the 1970s and 1980s.[5] Conversely, the fact that there are many other possible explanations for declining transfer rates indicates that these innovations may be helpful but still fail to address the problems caused by poor high school preparation, the lack of financial aid, the need for careful assessment and educational planning to reduce the tendency to "mill around", or the failure to offer the courses necessary for transfer within the community college.

One implication is that the current preoccupation with improving transfer rates with transfer centers, articulation agreements, and the like will not prove very effective, because they address only one of the many causes of declining transfer. If decreasing transfer rates are examples of "death by a thousand cuts", due to a thousand small causes, then it will be important to make progress against each of the causes if transfer rates are to be improved.

The Arguments for the Comprehensive Community College

A different objection to the current preoccupation with transfer is that it threatens to change the comprehensive community college — to de-emphasize its vocational and remedial efforts and to return to an earlier ideal of a largely transfer-oriented institution. There is much to be said for such specialization: clearly transfer-oriented institutions could then emphasize the academic coursework necessary for transfer within their states, without the distractions of providing a wider array of courses; and their students would be self-selected and more likely to aspire to transfer. Similar arguments could be made on behalf of purely vocational institutions and technical institutes. In my view, however, there are many principled arguments for maintaining the comprehensive community college — arguments that are often assumed but rarely made explicit.[6] They imply that

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[5] Tom Fryer has pointed out that this may have been the case in California, as enrollments in public four-year institutions reached capacity and fewer places were available for transfer students. It is unclear how important this has been in explaining transfer, and whether something similar happened in other states.

[6] For example, the report of the Commission on the Future of the Community Colleges, *Building Communities*, assumes that colleges will continue to provide academic, vocational, remedial, and community-service programs, but nowhere presents any argument for comprehensiveness; the Master Plan for the state of California asserts that transfer and vocational education are the principal mission of the community college, with remedial education also "important", but never clarifies why all functions should be preserved.

shifting toward more academic institutions would be the wrong course to take. Probably everyone's rationales for comprehensiveness differ, but mine include the following:

The difficulty of institutional transitions

Transitions among institutions are difficult for everyone. Moving into a new institution involves learning new rules and practices, a new culture, new expectations, new roles, new forms of authority; the physical setting is likely to be quite different and potentially frightening; the criteria for success are likely to be different. As a result there has always been great concern about the transitions: from the family to early education or child care, from elementary school to junior high, from high school to college, from school to work, from employment or household work back into education for re-entry students; and new jobs with new employers are widely thought to be extremely stressful. There have always been programs to ease these transitions — especially because those who fail to make transitions successfully are more likely to be those individuals without fiscal and emotional resources including low-income individuals, those of lower class backgrounds, minorities, people without parental support or supportive peer networks, and those who are socially isolated. Articulation agreements between two- and four-year colleges are examples of arrangements to ease such transitions, of course.

Thus it is plausible to have specialized transfer colleges, technical institutes, and remedial institutions (like adult education), with mechanisms of referral and coordination to enable individuals with different needs to negotiate the transitions among them. However, a better solution is simply to incorporate these functions in one comprehensive institution, eliminating the need for institutional transitions. As long as many adults entering postsecondary education need several different kinds of preparation, including both academic and vocational education as well as remediation, comprehensive institutions are probably superior to a series of specialized institutions.

Serving "experimenters" and "undecided" students

A large number of students who enter community colleges appear to be "experimenters", unsure whether postsecondary education is appropriate for them but interested in learning more about what it requires (Manski, 1988). Others are sure they want to continue in postsecondary education to improve their options, but are unsure about which career options are most suitable.From the student's viewpoint, community colleges are likely to be the best institutions to explore their options, because they are nearby, low-cost-, low-risk, and they enable individuals to examine new alternatives without breaking old commitments (like employment). It is difficult to know how many students are "experimenting" or undecided because many questionnaires asking students about their plans force them to choose among alternatives, and because students may be reluctant to admit their uncertainty; but community colleges counselors and teachers are nearly

unanimous in declaring how many students have poorly-formed plans. (In this community colleges are distinctly different from postsecondary technical institutes, whose students are more likely to enter with clear occupational goals.) By definition experimenters and undecided students don't know whether they want to follow a terminal vocational program, a terminal academic program, or a program (either academic or vocational) leading to a four-year college; but the presence of all these options in one institution — rather than their segregation in specialized institutions — makes the process of evaluating and choosing among the alternatives easier.

Indeed, there are reasons to think that the numbers of experimenters and undecided students are likely to increase. The guidance and counseling function within the high school seem to have collapsed, leaving many high school graduates without good information about career options. The numbers of older students needing retraining for new careers — including displaced workers, those searching for new occupations because of the increased turnover of jobs, and homemakers returning to the labor force — has also been going up. As long as the numbers of students unclear about their educational and occupational goals are large, the argument for the comprehensive community college remains strong.

Integrating academic and vocational education

A constant concern during the past century has been the balance of general or academic education and vocational or specific preparation for employment. Vocational education, first within high schools and now within community colleges and other postsecondary institutions, has always distinguished itself from shorter-term job training by the relatively greater breadth and depth of its offerings, and by the inclusion of related academic coursework. Providing the academic preparation related to vocational programs is easier in comprehensive community colleges than in specialized vocational or technical institutes, where it is sometimes necessary to turn to nearby schools to provide related academic preparation. Conversely, the inclusion of vocational courses within a comprehensive community college provides distinct benefits to students pursuing academic programs: almost all students completing academic Associate degrees take some vocational courses, often courses in business that are valuable in virtually every occupation (Grubb, 1987).

Indeed, there appears to be a general concern within community colleges and technical institutes about the appropriate balance of academic and vocational coursework.[7] Whatever the outcome of this concern may be, integrating academic and vocational education is much simpler in

[7] As part of my research at the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, I have been examining the integration of academic and vocational education at both the high school and the postsecondary levels. Based on interviews with academic and vocational deans in about 20 postsecondary institutions, we found a high level of awareness and concern about the appropriate balance of academic and vocational content, though most institutions have not acted on their concern aside from discussions about core curricula required of all students.

a comprehensive community college than it is in specialized institutions which lack either vocational or academic offerings.

Making developmental education more effective

Virtually every institution of higher education has been forced over the past decade to offer more remedial or developmental education, either in basic courses located within math and English departments or in special learning centers. Most of these programs appear to take a similar approach: deficiencies in reading, writing, or math are identified by means of a standardized assessment instrument, and the deficiencies are then decomposed into smaller components which students then practice, often with the aid of computers — an approach we label "skills and drills".[8] Such remediation is virtually always dissociated from the academic or vocational coursework for which students have entered community colleges. Unfortunately, dropout rates in remedial programs are high, partly because many adult students have a low tolerance for abstract forms of learning that seem remote from their goals.

An alternative approach, largely developed in experimental settings, is to combine remediation with the subject matter (either specifically vocational or academic) which students want to learn — an approach best known in Sticht's (1987) functional context literacy training, but applicable in other settings as well. While there is little evidence about the effectiveness of different approaches to remediation, integrating remediation with specific subject matter provides a possible antidote to the abstract and disconnected character of most developmental education. However, such an approach would only be possible within a comprehensive institution, where both academic and vocational faculty can work with developmental faculty in creating new forms of remediation.

Equity and status concerns

Still another rationale for the comprehensive community college stems from a concern with equity. A system of specialized vocational and academic institutions will, almost inevitably, result in a kind of tracking where academic institutions have higher status and include students of higher socio-economic status (including more white and Asian-American students and those of higher family incomes) and those perceived to have higher abilities, while lower-ability students are relegated to lower-status vocational programs. This pattern — familiar in high schools — also

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[8] Again as part of research being undertaken at the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, my colleagues and I are examining remedial education in community colleges, JTPA programs, and welfare-to-work programs, based partly on interviews with those in charge of remediation in about 30 communities. We have so far found relatively few alternatives to "skills and drills" — though there are a few programs, including learning centers in some community colleges, that take a variety of approaches to remediation rather than relying entirely on "skills and drills".

shows up in differences between community colleges and technical institutes.[9] One consequence has been to make mobility from lower-status and vocational tracks into higher status and academic tracks more difficult, and tracking has often led to resource disparities as well. The danger, then, is that shifting the comprehensive community college to a more transfer-oriented institution, or moving toward a system of specialized vocational and academic institutions will inadvertently discourage the participation of exactly the "non-traditional" students — those whose parents have not been to college, those without substantial family income, those whose past academic performance has been lackluster — whom community colleges have tried to include.

Articulating the two "systems" of education and training

Two extensive systems of education and training have developed in this country. One includes the familiar educational institutions, arranged in a hierarchy from elementary schools, through secondary schools, community colleges, and four-year colleges, and dominated by the B.A. degree. Despite its obviously vocational purpose of preparing students for professional and managerial occupations, this relatively well-articulated system is usually considered academic in its focus. The other is a much looser "system" of work-related education and training which includes high school vocational education, vocational education in community colleges, technical institutes, and area vocational schools, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs, welfare-to-work programs, proprietary vocational schools, state economic development initiatives, workplace literacy efforts, and a plethora of smaller special-purpose job training programs (McDonnell and Grubb, 1990; Grubb and McDonnell, 1990). While the work-related education and training "system" is less well-articulated than the educational system, in many local communities some coherence and coordination among programs has developed that makes it possible, for example, for JTPA and welfare clients to enroll in community colleges and technical institutes.

Because it includes both academic and vocational components, the comprehensive community college is virtually the only institution which participates actively in both "systems". The community college is therefore a bridge between the two, a mechanism whereby those enrolled in short-term, entry-level job training can make their way into the larger educational system — an expanded sense of the community college as a "second chance" institution. However, to the extent that community colleges see themselves as academic and transfer-oriented institutions, they tend not to cooperate with shorter-term job training programs like JTPA and welfare-to-work programs, effectively destroying the link between the two "systems" (Grubb et al., 1990). If we value an articulated education and training system, rather than one in which transitions among specialized

[9] Students entering technical institutes are, compared to those entering community colleges, more likely to be of lower socio-economic status, of lower ability levels, to have been in vocational rather than academic tracks in high school, and are much less likely to aspire to B.A. degrees; see Grubb (1989b).

programs are difficult, then it is important to maintain comprehensive community colleges as the points of connection between the two systems.

There are, then, many principled reasons for maintaining community colleges as comprehensive institutions, rather than stressing academic and transfer purposes over vocational and remedial functions.[10] In fact, a preference for comprehensive rather than specialized educational institutions has been characteristic of other levels of the public educational system in this country: the comprehensive high school has been the dominant form of secondary education since the turn of the century — despite recent interest in specialized magnet schools — and most public four-year colleges are also comprehensive institutions, rather than specializing either in liberal arts (as many elite private colleges do) or in occupational areas. At the most general level, comprehensive institutions are more consistent with American ideals of liberalism (in this case, student choice) and equity than are specialized institutions. I conclude, then, that community colleges should resist the pressures to emphasize their transfer functions to the detriment of other purposes. The challenge instead is to improve transfer rates while maintaining the integrity of the comprehensive community college.

Enhancing Transfer and Other Purposes within the Comprehensive Community College

Given the recent concern over transfer rates, how can solutions be developed that respond to the many causes of declining transfer? And how can transfer be increased while still maintaining the balance of purposes within the comprehensive community college? One response is to redefine the problem: the purpose of the comprehensive community college should be to enable all students to meet the goals which they establish for themselves — or the revised goals they formulate after some experience in college — whether that goal is transfer, a vocational program (of different possible lengths), or the acquisition of certain basic skills. With this desideratum, any reforms should not only increase transfer rates, but also increase the rates at which students complete *any* programs they set for themselves. Many proposals to enhance transfer rates can be expanded to include all groups of students, and by doing so they will become comprehensive. Among the most obvious are the following:

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[10] There are also quite practical reasons for maintaining a balance of vocational and academic purposes, since nationwide about 75 percent of students in community colleges appear to be in vocational programs.

Initial assessment and counseling

If one source of decreasing transfer rates and increasing dropout rates is the number of experimenters and undecided students entering community colleges, then initial assessment and counseling (including an attempt to clarify each student's educational goals) is appropriate for all students — not for a subset of them, and certainly not for full-time students only (as in the initial stages of California's matriculation system).

Remediation centers, linked to both academic and vocational programs

Some part of declining transfer rates is due to increasing numbers of poorly-prepared students entering community colleges — a cause that better articulation with four-year colleges can do nothing to remedy, and a problem that affects vocational as well as academic programs. The most immediate solution within the scope of community colleges is improved remedial or developmental education. Although community colleges have been responsive in providing remedial services, there has not been much attention paid — by community colleges or any of the other institutions providing remediation — to the characteristics of *effective* practice. Greater attention to effectiveness, in order to reduce dropout rates within remedial sequences and increase progress through others programs, would enhance all the missions of the comprehensive community college. I suspect that effectiveness will require greater articulation of remedial efforts with the academic and vocational programs students plan to enter.

Emphasizing coherent programs

A common problem in all parts of the educational system where students have substantial choice is the tendency to view the curriculum as a set of independent courses which students choose as their interests dictate, rather than as programs of related courses in coherent sequences. This generates the problem of the "shopping mall high school" (Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, 1985), but it is equally an issue in community colleges and four-year colleges (Zemsky, 1990). Replacing this conception with a greater emphasis on coherent programs — including mechanisms designed to ensure that students complete such programs — would enhance transfer rates by increasing the numbers of students completing the prerequisites for four-year colleges, but it would enhance the vocational role of community colleges as well by ensuring that students leave with sufficient skills to enter well-paid careers with subsequent mobility.

A related problem is the complaint among those examining transfer that some community colleges have failed to provide the sophomore-level courses necessary for transfer, simply because enrollments in such courses would be relatively low. An obvious antidote is for institutions to make sure that such courses are available, even if they seem to cost more than the revenues they generate. However, such problems may exist in vocational programs as well, particularly if

dropout rates and high equipment costs raise the cost per student in advanced vocational courses. Again, the appropriate remedy is for community colleges to ensure that coherent sequences of courses are available, whether in vocational, academic, or remedial divisions.

Comprehensive information on student progress

Those seeking to enhance transfer have proposed (and sometimes implemented) student tracking systems, providing information both to students and to counselors about progress toward the requirements for transfer. However, the problem of students falling behind in their coursework is just as serious for those in vocational and in remedial programs as for those intending to transfer. The obvious solution is to develop comprehensive data systems, rather than those for transfer students only.

Improvement of instruction

The "academic" model of enhancing transfer proposed by the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer seeks to improve academic instruction in order to enhance transfer. However, consistent with the emphasis of the community college on its role as a teaching institution (emphasized in *Building Communities*), it is more appropriate to improve instruction across the comprehensive community college, not just in one segment. Indeed, enhancing instructional methods may be just as important in vocational programs, where many instructors come from industry and have little knowledge of appropriate teaching techniques, and in developmental education, where relatively few instructors seem to have specialized training in alternative teaching methods appropriate for adults and for basic skills.

Placement and transfer centers

If colleges establish transfer centers to help students with the details of transfer, the analogues for other students are placement centers, to help them establish career goals and move into appropriate employment. Indeed, the placement function in many community colleges is relatively weak, though some have enhanced their placement offices with prodding from JTPA and welfare-to-work programs. A symmetry between placement and transfer centers would provide help to all students, whether their goals are further education or immediate employment.

Comprehensive follow-up statistics

The National Effective Transfer Consortium and the Transfer Assembly have concentrated on developing better data on transfer rates, to improve the information available and to forestall the use of clearly inappropriate measures of transfer. These proposals are surely valuable since information about transfer is typically sparse. However, information about subsequent

employment and its relationship to community college programs is equally sparse — and equally necessary if colleges are to assess the success of all their programs. The appropriate response, then is a comprehensive student follow-up system, rather than one which collects information only about transfers.

Increasing student aid

Although the contribution of student aid to declining transfer rates is unclear, the evidence suggests that aid is more effective in enhancing retention in two-year institutions than in four-year colleges (Murdock, 1987; Leslie and Brinkman, 1987; Manski and Wise, 1983) — in turn suggesting that increasing student aid would facilitate completing of both transfer and vocational programs. Students in community colleges are less likely to receive student aid than are equally-needy students in four-year colleges and proprietary schools, a result which may be due to relatively understaffed student aid offices (Grubb and Tuma, 1990). Making more concerted efforts to assure that all students receive as much aid — especially grant aid — as they are entitled to might improve transfer rates as well as other measures of success.

Improving student preparation through 2+2 programs

If some of the declining transfer rate is sue to weaker academic preparation of high school students, another attack on this problem is to work with local high schools — through 2+2 programs, tech prep programs, and other articulation arrangements — to clarify to students while they are in high school the importance of mastering certain academic competencies if they are to succeed in postsecondary education. This approach has the advantage of improving the average preparation of all young students entering community college, whether they intend to transfer or to enrol in vocational programs.

These proposals share two common elements: they provide educational services to all students, rather than to transfer students only; and they focus more on progress through community colleges than on the articulation of community colleges with four-year institutions. They therefore have the possibility of increasing transfer rates while simultaneously enhancing the vocational and remedial functions of the comprehensive community college, and they address several causes of declining transfer rates — and of increasing dropout rates more generally — rather than assuming that articulation with four-year colleges is the most important remedy.

The common metaphor of the swinging pendulum implies that community colleges have been constantly lurching from one extreme to the other, rejecting a former emphasis in favor of a new one. This is not the best way, in my opinion, for an institution to develop since some of the energy for reform must be devoted to dismantling or redirecting what was already in place. The

challenge is instead to stop the pendulum from swinging, to come to some reasonably stable equilibrium among the multiple purposes of the community college. To do this it is crucial to view the multiple missions of the community college not as a series of competing purposes, with any strengthening of one coming at the expense of others, but as a set of mutually reinforcing purposes where the reforms to strengthen one will simultaneously enhance the others.

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